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Alternative Conceptions of the Federal Role in Education: Thinking Anew about What to Aid, and How

Chester E. Finn, Jr.

Federal aid to education is today an extremely complex enterprise, and most proposals to change the present pattern appear just as intricate in their own right. In fact, however, almost any given program, policy recommendation or issue can be understood by the layman (or perhaps even the Congressman) if presented in the form of answers to four questions:

1. Is the aid given to individual consumers (i.e. students, families, parents) to help them obtain more, better, or different education, or is it given to institutions (i.e., schools, local and state education agencies) to help them provide education?
2. Is the aid given to all individuals or institutions, or only to some? (Do private as well as public schools receive it? Is it given only to those with certain characteristics or student populations such as schools undergoing desegregation, schools with large numbers of non-English speaking students, those with many low income students?)
3. Are recipients free to do as they like with the federal money, or are they obliged to alter their behavior in specified ways?
4. Is the federal aid parcelled out in ways that are oblivious to pre-existing disparities in (nonfederal) educational resource levels or ways that are intended to equalize such differences (or to create purposeful discrepancies, such as additional resources for categories of students thought to require more than other students)?

None of these dichotomies pertains exclusively to education. Indeed,

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slightly rephrased versions of the same four queries could be posed with respect to federal spending for health care, social services, housing, transportation, and many other domestic policy domains. For they are questions about spending strategies, not about specific policy objectives or program goals. And the answers to them are not necessarily determined by the nature of the subject at hand. That is, there is nothing inherent in education (or housing, mental health care, etc.) that rules out one option or ordains the other. Rather, each question is answerable—and the answers are changeable—through the political process.

While the present (summer, 1981) pattern of federal education aid is so complicated and the programs so numerous that every generalization must be accompanied by qualifications and exceptions, the overall shape of the enterprise is not now much different than it has been since 1965, and it can be described in terms of the second alternative in each of the four dichotomies posed above. Federal aid to elementary and secondary education is ordinarily given to state and local agencies rather than to students and families; is given to certain schools (and schools with certain categories of students), not to all; is usable only for specific purposes and activities, and must be accounted for in ways that show that it altered the practices of schools receiving it; and is parcelled out according to criteria and formulae intended either to reduce existing discrepancies in educational spending and activity levels or to induce purposeful differentials on behalf of specific categories of schools and students.

It bears repeating that none of these general characteristics inheres in the nature of American elementary/secondary education itself, or in the nature of federal assistance *per se*. The first alternative could have been chosen in each case. That it was not attests to a unique blend of historical happenstance, practical politics, social policy fads, and governmental styles.

Let us first try to encapsulate (and necessarily oversimplify) the chosen alternatives to the dichotomies with which we began in four adjectives that describe the major characteristics of the existing federal role in elementary/secondary education financing. The knowledgeable reader will immediately realize that not all the terms apply with equal force to every program; again, the object is to outline broad features, not details or exceptions.

1. Federal aid is *institutional* rather than individual. It works through the purveyors of education rather than the consumers. Schools or the governmental agencies (sometimes state, sometimes local) that run them apply for federal aid, receive it, are directly affected by the terms on which it is given, are obliged to account for the uses to which it is put, and are subject to evaluations of its effectiveness. In this respect, federal education policy resembles transportation policy, where aid from Washington

comes to the transit authority rather than to subway riders, but differs from housing and health policy, much of which subsidizes customers in the marketplace to obtain whatever housing and health care they like; and differs markedly from income maintenance policy, which consists almost entirely of transferring resources to individuals rather than institutions.

2. Federal aid is *categorical* rather than universal. Not all schools receive it. Only those with specified institutional and student characteristics qualify, and those characteristics define the categories of students and activities deemed worthy of aid. There is, it should be noted, something of a paradox in that eligibility for most federal aid depends on *pupil* characteristics while the aid itself is institutional. Thus, a low income or handicapped or non-English speaking child helps to make his school eligible for federal funds, but the funds go to the school, not the child. The "child-benefit" theory was the great political compromise that ended the stalemate blocking federal aid to education. Federal money would not, under this doctrine, assist schools to go about their customary work; rather, it would help pay for extra education for children with special needs, for the solving of specified educational problems, and for the easing of particular conditions. Politically, the main reason for this approach was to make it possible for children attending nonpublic schools, particularly Roman Catholic parochial schools, to be eligible for federal education aid on the same basis as those attending public schools. As it was already clear in the early sixties that aid confined to public schools could not get through Congress, while giving outright subsidies to church-affiliated schools carried too many political problems and constitutional uncertainties, the "child benefit" theory was an ingenious solution. But it must be said that it has not worked very well in practice; most federal aid programs have not conferred equal benefit on private school students with the same characteristics as their public school counterparts.

3. Federal aid is *instrumental*, rather than general (or unrestricted). With few exceptions (Impact Aid being the largest), federal assistance programs do not simply underwrite the ordinary expenses of elementary and secondary schools. Rather, the federal programs enlist the schools in solving certain social problems (some of which are but indirectly related to formal education), in making certain educational changes, and in providing benefits to certain groups and constituencies. The schools are paid to do this (though often they are not fully compensated for their costs) and are monitored fairly carefully to ensure that a given allotment of federal aid is used only for its intended purpose (and that the schools do not reduce their own spending or allow federal monies to replace funds they would otherwise have spent). The underlying presumption is that absent the federal incentives (and regulations) the schools would not address

themselves to the problems, populations, and purposes designated by Washington and that it is therefore the purpose of federal aid *to induce schools to do things they would not otherwise do* (or could not otherwise afford to do however much they might wish to!). That is far different from helping them pay the bills that arise in the course of carrying out what they conceive of as their regular educational missions.

4. Federal aid is *equalizing* rather than accepting of the financial status quo. Although Washington conspicuously (and to the lasting dismay of many school finance reformers) does not endeavor to bring about uniform per pupil expenditures in every part of the nation, the underlying rationale for existing federal aid draws heavily on a kind of fiscal conception of equal educational opportunity. That is why some programs (including the largest, Title I, now Chapter 1, ECIA) apportion aid according to formulae that are based substantially on indices of income and poverty, the rationale being that "poor" states and communities cannot afford to spend as much on education as wealthier ones and therefore should get more from Washington. That is also why many programs start with the assumption that properly educating children with certain characteristics (poor, handicapped, non-English speaking, etc.) costs more than educating children without those characteristics (and more than the state or locality would—or could—spend from its own resources) and therefore that providing those youngsters with truly equal educational opportunity requires purposeful inequalities in the sums spent on them.

No master plan or grand design ordained these characteristics of federal aid, and there is nothing sacrosanct about them. The present-day pattern of federal education policy is analogous to a complex modern civilization with a culture that shows the influences of earlier eras, of wars won and lost, of compromises among diverse traditions and beliefs, of established custom and recent innovation, and of accommodations to the imperatives of various groups, movements, fads, and ideas.

It should be noted that the federal education policy stream actually flows through two channels, although they have many common tributaries, spill over into each other at a number of locations, and nearly always run parallel. The first, which is the focus of this paper, consists of money: dollars given out by Washington on behalf of one or another policy objective. The second consists of rules, mandates, and regulations that attempt to alter the contours of the nation's educational system by obliging people and institutions to act in ways that they might not otherwise act.

Although not the subject of this paper, the regulatory strategy has been at least as vigorously pursued and as potent a means of imposing federal policy objectives on American education as the fiscal strategy. The regulations are often attached to the money, of course, but not always. Not

infrequently, they have lives of their own, and while financial aid is often the "carrot" utilized to induce compliance with the regulations—and cutting off the aid is often the "stick" used to deal with noncompliance—it is not unusual to find that the actions mandated by the regulations have only the haziest relationship to the uses of the assistance money itself.

Federal Involvement in Education: Sources and Criticisms

The federal education aid edifice that existed in 1981 could be described as a rambling, somewhat ramshackle structure that was designed, redesigned, added to, and refurbished over the years by six different firms of architects, contractors, and interior decorators who sometimes synchronized their efforts, sometimes disagreed violently, and sometimes simply went about their business oblivious to what the others were doing. Briefly characterized, those "firms" were:

—*The Constitution*. Since the United States Constitution is silent on the subject of education, conferring no explicit authority or responsibility on the Federal Government, any federal involvement in education has necessarily been roundabout, derived from the nonspecific power of the Congress to "provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States." This stands in marked contrast to the provisions in most state constitutions obliging them to provide education for their citizens, and necessarily surrounds federal ventures in the field with some tentativeness.

—*The civil rights movement*. Not until the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 removed the issue of race from the arena of education policy debates did it become politically possible to pass school aid legislation through the Congress. But federal aid was—and today remains—a significant weapon in the arsenal of those who hold that the foremost responsibility of the national government in the field of education, indeed perhaps its only Constitutional responsibility, is to provide equal opportunity to every citizen.

—*The War on Poverty*. It is no coincidence that compensatory education was a major strategy for winning the War on Poverty, or that Lyndon Johnson was responsible both for declaring that war and for bringing about a great expansion of federal education aid. Rightly or wrongly, weak educational achievement was perceived to be an important source of economic disadvantage, and boosting the level of that achievement was held to improve the prospects of poor youngsters to move into the socio-economic mainstream. The "compensatory" programs comprise the clearest example of Washington's instrumental approach to education aid; the rationale for giving money to the schools was so that students attending those schools would grow up to earn more money!

—*Political pay-offs and benefits*. Federal education aid, like other domes-

tic policy domains, has its share of programs whose origins can most honestly be explained—though seldom are—as gratuities, rewards or friendly gestures to interest groups and constituencies whose support, goodwill, or help was judged important by persons in positions of influence in the policymaking process.

—*Educational reform.* At the opposite pole from the “cynical, political” motives just mentioned, one finds much evidence of a continuing impulse—sometimes innocently idealistic, sometimes zealously ideological—to use federal money to reform American education by paying schools to alter and presumably improve their activities.

—*Holding schools harmless from federally-created costs.* Though the principle that Washington should compensate educational institutions for the full costs of anything it requires of them has not taken hold in general, several large federal elementary/secondary school aid programs can be described in those terms. The Impact Aid program is intended to make up revenues lost because property that would otherwise be taxed to support the local schools is federally-owned (or somehow federally-affected, such as public housing); and the former Emergency School Assistance Program (ESAA) was little more than a fiscal lollypop to school districts undergoing the often-traumatic and sometimes-expensive process of desegregation at the behest of the Federal Government.

As I see it, those were the six most important determinants of the current pattern of federal aid to elementary/secondary education: a tenuous constitutional basis, a commitment to civil rights and equal opportunity, a desire to wipe out educational and economic disadvantages, a pattern of rewards for influential groups, a desire to reform the educational system in specific ways, and a partial sense of obligation to underwrite costs imposed from Washington.

So what is wrong with it? The fact that the education aid structure would not win any architectural prizes is not reason enough to be dissatisfied with it or to wish to reform it. Plenty of other federal policy domains are unlovely, multi-dimensional, and puzzling to the newcomer, but criticism of public policy should be grounded in something more than esthetics.

In large measure, the principal—and in my view most valid—criticisms of federal elementary/secondary education policy are predictable and all-but-inevitable corollaries of the policies themselves. That is, as one looks at the key determinants of the existing pattern, one can surmise with reasonable confidence what kinds of criticisms and objections would be forthcoming. I have identified what I take to be the most serious objections and most legitimate criticisms, and now list 12 of them. They divide into three rough categories: questionable purposes; flaws in the aid-dispensing machinery; and regulatory burdens and other constraints.

But because critics do not necessarily organize their complaints and lamentations according to this typology, the reader is warned that most of the following criticisms overlap their categorical borders.

Questionable Purposes

1. The “instrumental” nature of federal education policy means that schools are constantly being assigned social tasks that they are incapable of performing satisfactorily (e.g., ending poverty) and others that complicate their performance of traditional tasks that are their singular—and appropriate—responsibility.

2. Federal notions about curriculum and pedagogy sometimes exacerbate and inflame some of the most volatile issues in education, which are also those most likely to stir the ire of parents and resentment of communities: namely, those pertaining to families, values, morals, ethics, and beliefs.

3. In part because federal education programs conspicuously aid and cater to so many identifiable “special interests,” keen resentment is felt by groups that go unrewarded, whose singular enthusiasms are not shared by Washington, or whose perceived opponents are assisted.

4. The categorical and instrumental nature of federal education aid demands incessant evaluations to see whether the individual programs are “succeeding,” but time and again the available evidence indicates that they are not. By contrast, programs that undertake simply to transfer money—revenue sharing or, in the field of education, impact aid—need only show that the transfer occurred. Since the answers to questions asked by evaluations are usually “we don’t know,” or “we can’t be sure,” or “we think so, but. . .,” the overall result could hardly be other than a pervasive sense of disappointment, of failure, of wasted money and effort, of dashed hopes and unfulfilled dreams.

Flaws in the Dispensing Machinery

5. By aiding schools only, federal policy does little to strengthen the educational marketplace, to foster diversity and competition among schools, or to give choices to students and control to parents.

6. By not aiding all schools in equal amount, federal policy creates resentment and a sense of injustice among persons involved with schools that receive little or no aid. This is true both of discretionary programs—the disappointment that necessarily follows when many apply but only some are funded—and of formula programs tied to factors such as poverty that are not uniformly distributed.

7. Federal programs distribute aid according to cockeyed criteria and obsolete formulas and, consequently, do not treat the recipients “fairly.” Title I, now Chapter I, is the largest and most conspicuous “offender”

here. Its use of economic poverty as a proxy for educational disadvantage has raised eyebrows and precipitated Congressional debate since it was first proposed.

8. Federal aid is divided among too many programs, and their provisions are too complicated and confusing. The pattern of fiscal relationships between grantor and grantee is too complex; too many requirements must be met, too many rules obeyed and too much monitoring, accounting, record-keeping, and evaluating done.

Regulatory Burdens and Other Constraints

9. The regulations attached to certain federal programs (and, of course, other regulations not directly linked to aid programs) create dollar costs for the recipient that exceed the amount of aid given. The best-known examples are the mandates in P.L. 94-142 for the education of handicapped youngsters, which in most communities cost far more to obey than Washington provides.

10. Excesses in federal efforts to protect various rights and interests through aid programs and regulations create other than financial costs. In the area of civil rights, the deepest resentment is stirred when people who themselves took no part in discriminatory actions see their own children's education somehow diminished or interfered with in order to satisfy a federal official's (or judge's) view of civil rights for others. This includes such things as abolishing selective academic programs and schools because the criteria for selection are held to be unfair; and—much the most notorious—obliging children to travel to schools other than those their parents want them to attend.

11. Federal programs reduce and impede the authority of those—mostly state and local agencies, but also individual principals and teachers—who bear the major responsibility to provide children with education, and do so without supplying enough help and financial resources to make the interference seem worthwhile.

12. Besides instilling questionable values, federal policy tends to make it harder for schools to encourage appropriate behavior and good discipline. In the main, it should be noted, federal constraints on school discipline do not come directly from aid programs, but rather from interpretations of civil rights statutes and constitutional protections. But the view that Washington is somehow doing what it can to erode discipline and reward indiscipline cannot be entirely separated from other undertakings that a wary parent could readily view as efforts to keep in school and cater to the very persons that he would most like *out* of school, at least out of the school attended by his own child.

Unfortunately, the perceived shortcomings of many federal school aid programs and policies coincide with an ever-more widespread percep-

tion of educational dilapidation and school decay in the nation as a whole. This is not the place for a full-scale analysis of "what's wrong with the schools," but simply to state the impressions received in the course of such an examination: A great many parents, teachers, and taxpayers believe that American schools are providing their students with an education of poor quality. Many gauges are used and differing kinds of evidence adduced: declining scores on such standardized measures as the Scholastic Aptitude Tests, the mounting need for remedial instruction in college, employers' laments that many high school graduates seeking jobs are not really literate, the declining enrollment in rigorous "academic" subjects, the atmosphere of indiscipline and frivolity in many schools, and so forth.

There are, to be sure, also some recent signs of qualitative improvements. But—so characteristic of the United States, where public outrage about a problem often peaks just as the problem is beginning to ease—such scattered evidence does not begin to offset the general impression conveyed by opinion polls, election results, national magazine features, network television specials, and columns by educational pundits: that our schools aren't nearly as good as they should be, they are not effective at teaching basic skills, they spend too much time on educational ephemera, and their students are not learning enough.

This gloomy popular perception of American education fits into a discussion of federal policy in three ways that could stand as broad summaries of the specific criticisms listed above:

First, much of what the Federal Government does in elementary/secondary education, it does poorly. The programs do not work very well. Opportunity is not effectively equalized, and the effort to equalize it has negative, even damaging consequences. The regulatory burdens, in particular, are heavier than the amount of aid provided can justify.

Second, the Federal Government does not do much of what it ought most to be doing, namely attempting to foster educational excellence. Improving the quality of education is conspicuously missing from most lists of federal policy objectives; when found at all, it is usually subordinated to the goal of "equity," which has been Washington's dominant thrust for the better part of two decades but which is at least partly in conflict with the idea of quality. And, although modest sums of federal aid are directed to "school improvement" reforms of various kinds, these have had more to do with trendy curricular and pedagogical innovations than with rigorous instruction in basic academic skills and subjects.

Third, much of what Washington does do, if not actually destructive of what most people would regard as educational quality, makes it harder for those running the schools to devote their energies to improved quality. The Federal Government tends to inhibit others—state and local gov-

ernments, school boards, principals, teachers, and parents—from vigorously pursuing the goal of educational excellence according to their own lights. While many of these inhibitions emerge from Washington's regulatory excesses, others are embedded in the pattern of financial assistance: in the nature of the activities for which aid is provided, in the terms by which it is provided, in the manifold distractions and diversions that it entails, and in the absence of help for the essential elements of educational quality.

Ineffective at what it does try to do, increasingly the domain of special interests, unreasonably complex, and unjustifiably intrusive, it is little wonder that the current pattern of federal aid (and regulation) has few defenders and enjoys little support save from the groups that think they benefit from it, from the people who designed it, from those so accustomed to it as to have developed a form of dependency on it, and from those who cannot imagine anything different or better.

Restructuring the Federal Role

What to do? In the concluding portion of this paper, I outline a tentative conception of the proper federal role in aiding elementary and secondary education in the United States. It has four parts, only one of which is a bit complicated. The careful reader will note that, in the course of this presentation, I amend or reverse the existing answers to the four basic questions with which we began. I like to think that I also respond, at least in part, to the aforementioned criticisms of existing federal aid.

The reader is reminded that this prescription deals only with the purposes and powers of the federal purse in the field of elementary and secondary education. I make no effort here to suggest how Washington should enforce rights conferred by the Constitution or by statute, save to note a strong preference for separating these from the spending power as completely as possible. Perhaps half the difficulties in existing federal education policy result from the effort to take monies appropriated for one purpose and hold them hostage to other purposes, goals, and principles. Let us spend for the purposes we think justify federal aid, and enforce rights through the means available: ultimately a court enjoining the continued operation of a school or school system that violates the Constitution or the laws.

1. The first responsibility of the Federal Government is to gather, analyze and publish timely and comprehensive *information* about the scope and condition of education in the United States. This is not an aid program as such (although it would be nice if the National Center for Education Statistics had the resources to make modest sums available to states, localities, and private schools to gather and analyze data about

themselves), but for nearly a century and a quarter it has been the core of the federal education enterprise and should so remain.

2. The second responsibility of the Federal Government is to endeavor to improve the quality of American education through research, development, dissemination of findings and results, technical assistance to schools that want it, and adroit use of the "bully pulpit" to encourage and exhort students, parents, teachers, and school boards to do better. We must distinguish exhortation from regulation, and should note that encouragement need not necessarily be done with money.

3. The third responsibility of the Federal Government is to compensate schools (both public and private) for expenses that it imposes on them. Apart from costs associated with the enforcement of constitutional rights, schools should be entitled to full reimbursement of dollar costs resulting from actions (or inactions) of the Federal Government. Washington should require nothing of schools that it does not fully pay for.

4. The fourth—and hardest to describe—federal responsibility (as well as the costliest) is to provide financial assistance to schools and students in ways that help them to provide (or obtain) high quality education but that do not interfere with them. This proposal assumes a continuing consensus around the general idea of federal aid to education.

I would envision a single large aid program with these essential characteristics:

(a) An annual lump sum payment would be made by the Department of Education—or its successor—to every local education agency (LEA) that wished to receive it. (Participation would of course be optional.) For the sake of administrative simplicity, the money might be channeled through the states, but they would reallocate *all* of it to the LEAs (save in a situation such as Hawaii or the District of Columbia where there are no LEAs and the state agency actually runs the schools). Washington's responsibility is to aid schools, not to pay for state bureaucracies. And because, as will be explained below, the actual uses of the money are unrestricted, no one could argue that the Federal Government is in any way interfering with the ability of states to set standards and impose requirements on their schools.

(b) Payments would be based on the number of school-age children residing in the jurisdiction of the LEA. That is, a community containing .068% of all school age children in the country would receive .068% of that year's federal aid appropriation.

A variation that would complicate the formula but is nonetheless appealing would "weight" all or part of a community's allocation according to a ratio relating its school expenditures to its tax capacity. This would tend to reward communities (and states) that work hard at supporting their

schools and—if the federal payments were large enough—could give other communities an incentive to work harder. I will not attempt to specify such a formula—which should take into account such factors as the high nonschool expenditures that most central cities cannot avoid—but simply to state the idea on which it ought to rest: Rather than a dollar-for-dollar matching payment (which tends to reward wealthy communities) or a payment linked to income (which bears no relation at all to educational need or effort and is unfair to middle-income communities that work very hard at schooling), the weighted portion of the federal payment would in effect reward fiscal effort on behalf of education.

(c) The stated purpose of the federal payment would be to assist communities with the expense of providing quality education to all students, and the stated *preference* of the Congress would be for communities to use the federal funds to cover the additional costs associated with youngsters whose educational requirements are more expensive than the average. These would include students with handicaps, those not fluent in English, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to be sure, but might also include the gifted, the emotionally-troubled, those who must help support their families, and others with special (and costly) needs.

(d) There would, however, be no *requirement* that the federal funds be spent on any particular category of students or type of activity. And the only “maintenance of effort” or “supplement not supplant” requirement would relate to school expenditures as a whole, not to any particular category of students, schools, or programs. In other words, Washington would stipulate that its education aid be used for education, and not diverted directly or indirectly into road maintenance, police salaries, municipal hospitals, and so forth. But it would not impose any specific requirements on the uses of that aid *within* the education budget. To repeat, ~~because this is fundamental~~. The Federal Government would state its rationale for giving education aid and its preferences for the uses of that aid, but would rely entirely on the bully pulpit, on the moral force of its arguments, and on community pressures to carry out its purposes. Or not to, as the case may be.

(e) Private schools in a community would have a choice between receiving their portion of the federal funds directly and in cash, or enrolling certain of their students in programs and activities jointly devised with the public school system. But the choice would rest with the private schools, and a private school that enrolled, say, 2% of the youngsters residing in the territory of the LEA would be *entitled* to claim 2% of the federal funds from the LEA. Of course the constitutionality of this arrangement would be tested in court; but until it is tested one cannot know whether it will pass muster.

(f) Any parent would have the right to claim his child's portion of the federal funds from the LEA in the form of an education mini-voucher to be used for the purchase of whatever educational services he desired. This would be true whether the child was enrolled in public or private school, and the mini-voucher could be used at any public or private school (or a nonschool provider of educational services, such as a private tutor).

This is the one large condition that the LEA would have to accept along with its federal funds. Its purpose is to use the modest leverage of federal educational assistance money to foster competition, diversity, and choice among schools.

What would determine a child's "portion" of the federal funds? There are two possible approaches, and it may be desirable to allow each community to decide between them. One is simply to divide the total amount of federal aid received in a year by the total number of school-age children in the community; the quotient would be the amount that a parent could claim for a child. These amounts would likely be small.

Alternatively, if the LEA chose to honor Washington's preferences and use the federal monies only for the education of youngsters with particular characteristics that increase their schooling costs, then it would be reasonable to confine eligibility for the optional "mini-voucher" to youngsters with those same characteristics and to give them the (larger) amounts that result from dividing the federal payment among the more limited category of students. Under this arrangement, in return for his mini-voucher a parent would have to absolve the school of any responsibility for meeting the extra-cost educational needs of his child, since he would have chosen to take the money available for that purpose and used it himself for what he deemed to be his child's educational needs.

To sum up the essential characteristics of the foregoing proposal in comparison to existing policy:

1. Federal education aid should be both institutional and individual, that is, persons who believe they have a better idea of what to spend it on should be entitled to claim their portion. This option, it is hoped, will also encourage schools to be responsive, varied, and educationally competitive.

2. Federal education aid should be universal. All schools that wish to should receive it, all students should count in the "formula" that allocates it, and all parents should have the right to obtain their child's portion directly.

3. The objectives of the Federal Government in aiding education should be stated—and these should relate to educational excellence for all students—but the actual uses of the federal aid money should be unrestricted, that is, within the complete discretion of the local education

agency (or private school) so long as it is spent on education.

4. The allocation of federal aid should not be intentionally redistributive; it should either reflect simple population figures or it should reward educational fiscal effort on the part of individual communities.

5. The single most important criterion by which to judge any given aid program, regulation, or activity by the Federal Government in the field of education is whether it fosters educational quality as defined by those with direct responsibility for running and teaching in the schools. Washington should do nothing that makes it *harder* for a teacher to teach, for a principal to lead a school, or for a school board to do the best job it can to hire good people, define the curriculum, and evaluate the performances of its schools and their students. Financial aid is nice, as is health care; but federal education policymakers also need to memorize the old Latin maxim that is drilled into nascent doctors during their first year in medical school: *Primum non nocere*. First, do no harm.